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Threats, and International Relations

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Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee.

Thank you for holding this important hearing on one of the most pressing issues impacting both our nation's foreign policy and domestic civil rights. I would like to thank Chairman Shays and for inviting me to appear here.

The topics I would like to address include the need to improve our credibility among the Arab world through fairer treatment of Muslims and Arabs and institutions right here and to assess the challenges of building democratic institutions in the Middle East. I will also offer a brief context of the compatibility of Islam and democratic principles in history and the modern era. I will close with an expression of what we at the Islamic Free Market Institute and like-minded individuals in the US government and around the Muslim and Arab world feel would foster success of democracy.

Introduction

Ever since President Bush declared the War on Terror following the tragic attacks of September 11, the image and perception of US policy has unfortunately moved inversely proportional to what the Administration states. The bold pronouncements by the President on freedom and democracy in his Second Inaugural Address and recent European trip have the potential for appealing to a majority of Muslims and Americans, and I applaud the President and the Administration for making them. But before discussing those statements and the prospects for success of the Bush Doctrine in the Middle East and Muslim world, these new statements must be seen in the broader context of earlier statements by the Administration after 9-11 and the contradictory policies which continue to shadow any new initiatives. In other words, the United States has a credibility problem and no matter how grand the vision expressed, the Arab world may be justifiably cynical.

Statements Since 9/11

President Bush's reference to the attack on Al-Qaeda and the Taliban as a crusade and the initial moniker of the invasion of Afghanistan as Operation Eternal Freedom unnecessarily riled up people in the Arab and Muslim street with no corresponding benefit to strike fear in the enemy. The statements by General Boykin, who was not

removed from his critical position in intelligence-gathering for the DoD, demonstrate a callous disregard for respect of differing religions, which is all what Muslims expect from US policy makers. US Armed Forces Radio broadcasts content, including The Rush Limbaugh Show, that is perceived by listeners in the Muslim and Arab world not as any form of legitimate alternative viewpoint, but as a direct affront to Islam. This appearance of propaganda cannot be outweighed by the relatively fewer broadcasts like those by Radio Sawa and Al Hurra TV. The age of information can be used for us or against us, even if things turn out to be false. The most recent case of deadly riots in Afghanistan following uncorroborated and likely exaggerated stories of guards at Guantanamo Bay flushing copies of the Holy Qur'an shows how even rumors can have a profound impact on life in the Muslim street. In a nutshell, these early statements have cost us dearly in credibility and simply being given the benefit of the doubt; indeed the process of winning hearts and minds cannot even be started unless we can be believed.

My goal here today is not to simply restate anecdotal instances or perceptions of anti-Muslim or anti-Arab biases by US policy makers or media personalities. I mention these and other statements with the hope that the members of this Subcommittee and indeed the larger audience will recognize that words carry profound impact on any people- Muslims and Arabs are no different- it's human nature. Like hammering nails into a fence; you can always remove the nail, but the memory and damage remain.

Contradictions in Policy and Perception

More detrimental than the actual statements are impressions in the Arab world that US policies are aimed against Muslims, not only around the world, but in the US as well.

Contradictions abound: nomination of an outspoken opponent of the Mideast Roadmap to Peace, Daniel Pipes, to the US Institute of Peace, garnered few headlines here. But even among intelligentsia in the Muslim and Arab world, this type of appointment showed an Administration that rewarded a very extreme and intolerant brand of Islamic.

The most glaring examples of a contradiction of speaking of democracy in lofty terms and treating Muslims is the perception by Muslims of the treatment in the US of the

building blocks of any democracy: our civil institutions. Since September 11, Muslims all over the world have seen the closure of four of the largest and most successful Muslim-American charities, most of them under what the 9-11 Commission itself referred to as encroaching on Muslim civil liberties.¹

In an excellent article published late last year in the American Conservative magazine, the author highlighted numerous completely preventable scenarios where innocent American-Muslim have been accused of terror-related crimes.² This assessment of the impact of over-zealous post-9/11 law enforcement on the rights of Muslims right here in America must be on-going. The questions I recommend that members of Congress should ask this year when certain provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act are due to expire, is whether the security outweighs the impact on civil liberties which make our democracy the greatest the world has known. How this question is addressed will have lasting repercussions on the perception and image of American democracy in the Muslim and Arab world.

Islam and Democracy

Before offering an assessment of the Bush Doctrine on the Middle East and the Muslim World, a brief look at the history and demographics of Islam and democracy is in order.

The tactical underpinnings of democracy include representation, flow of information, consultation and accountability. Islamic law, *sharia*, is based upon the word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, the saying of the Prophet Muhammad and the interpretations and legal reasoning in modern society based upon those two sources. The Prophet's own succession is a perfect example of a democratic system. While some feel his son-in-law should automatically have become the caliph upon the Prophet's death, it was in fact his companion and best friend, Abu Bakr, who was given support, *baya*, of the Companions to become the leader. Other examples include the Prophet's command to his Companions on administrative and other affairs to "consult amongst yourselves" before making any decisions. Finally, the Quran and the

¹ Staff Monograph, Commission of the September 11 Attacks Upon the United States, Case Study Chapter 6 (August 2004).

² Undue Process, James Brovard, October 11, 2004, American Conservative.

Prophet's statements speak of the great responsibility a ruler or leader has on the well-being of the people.

Modern Nations

Modern democratic institutions have been alive and well in over half the world's Muslim population for the latter half of the 20th Century. A common misunderstanding among the American public is that the majority of Muslims are Arab. In fact, less than 20% of the world Muslim population is Arab. The countries with the largest Muslim populations, namely Indonesia, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh have to a large degree enjoyed the benefits of democratically elected leaders. Today, this adds up to over 500 million Muslims living under some form of democratic government. The so-called failed states with rouge regimes that some in the Administration argue should be replaced represent no more than 1% of the world's Muslim population.

Imposing an Athenian Democracy?

One perception problem with the US government's new found desire to promote democracy is the appearance of imposing our Greek-style version and by implying that there is either democracy or tyranny. But the world is a complex place and there are more than two just two choices.

Why, one might ask, have we not seen Velvet or Rose Revolutions in Arab or Muslim countries as we have observed in some Eastern Europe and former Soviet bloc nations after the fall of the Soviet Union? When occupation ended in Hungary, Georgia, and the Baltic States, enlightened leaders channeled the will of the masses towards a non-violent change.

To explain this requires showing the differences of that region and the Arab world. There is nothing innate about Arab history or culture to oppose democracy. But there is a unique situation of Arabs in the 20th Century emerging from Ottoman then British and French imperialism. While Eastern European countries under the Soviet bloc were led in name by one of their own, the occupation and support for the Iron Curtain-era dictators came from an outside nation- the Soviet Union. On the contrary, Arabs who find themselves under an authoritarian regime today are nevertheless ruled by one of their

own, not an imperial puppet. But one cannot blame occupation alone as an excuse for democracy. Consider that the only Arabs who are occupied by another people, Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, nevertheless had an election of their own. So Arabs and Muslims are very much capable and desirous of building democratic institutions, but in a means, method and timing based on their internal affairs and not based on the rise and fall of outside empires.

Arab Democratic Leaders?

So where are the Pavels and Walesas of the Arab world? Those who have a limited understanding of the Muslim religion and the Arab world have gone so far to say that left to their own devices, Muslim opposition leaders would choose one-man, one-vote, one-time and impose a draconian religious rule of law on an unsuspecting people. This is far from the truth. Indeed there are a variety of alternative leaders and would-be elected officials throughout all Arab countries. Some may be tolerated at home, others may be restrained or exiled. But the Arab world has learned from Eastern Europe and areas like Bosnia that change itself can be dangerous, and it may just be better to deal with a force you know than another you do not. In the nuanced world of geo-political realities, what the US must consider is that the only way to foster such groups with giving rise to unmanageable change is dialogue.

Dialogue and Institution-Building

The Institute is committed to the view that only through active participation by public, private and non-governmental organizations can democratically-inspired institutions thrive. These are the necessary and sufficient conditions to laying a foundation to build what would be in the best mutual interests of the US and the Arab and Muslim world. We must commit ourselves to letting those who want to live in freedom be made aware of the challenges. While our statements and policies at home have affected our credibility and perception in the international arena, we must not be deterred at offering Yankee ingenuity to address the needs for a free society. But rather than imposing our will and changing regimes or funding groups which will be forcefully

targeted or co-opted by the very regimes, we should invest resources in fostering and encouraging the development of democratic institutions in the Arab world.

In his first term, President Bush announced the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) to fund numerous programs on building democratic institutions. While hailed at the time as new thinking, these programs have not been subject to budgetary restraints and resistance from the very countries where the programs were to be administered. While the only answer is not to add more money, that is certainly a start: the US had an initial budget of less than \$100 million per year for MEPI, we spend almost a billion dollars per year in public diplomacy and hundreds of billions of dollars in military aid and operations.

Even though parity in funding is certainly an issue, it will not make the programs succeed overnight. The Institute is pleased that MEPI continues to be funded and pursued by the Bush Administration. The programs must be targeted, adaptive and focused on long-term needs to get illiterate, economically stagnated populations into the business of managing their own civic institutions.

Challenges to Development

To develop homegrown democratic institutions in the Arab world, it is not just a matter of buying results through programs. As stated earlier in my testimony, we have already hurt ourselves through policy and perception problems following 9-11. We must consider how current pro-American and pro-democratic trends in Muslim world have been fostered through past American programs (Peace Corps and Fulbright scholarships) and bilateral trade and travel among the Arab world and the US. The problem is not just whether a program succeeds but whether there is a genuine dialogue among the people of the Arab world and Americans. For example, the vast decline of foreign students from the Arab world due to post-9/11 hysteria, visa delays and other matters will have severe consequences towards not just bilateral relations, but also democracy-building in the Arab world.

Conclusion

What makes President Bush's new initiative so bold and desirable is how desperately most in the world would like it to succeed. But we must not allow ourselves to be deluded that we can just follow a concrete path to achieve abstract notions of freedom. Taking control of one's national destiny is a challenge that requires technical expertise, management of people and resources and adherence to the rule of law.

President Bush must be commended for opening the door to what really is the only way to global progress: a frank dialogue among all stakeholders who want seek laws molded around the values of representation, accountability and freedom.